



Children and Family Services
Training Center
Department of Social Work
University of North Dakota

Fostering Communications



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Building a Network of People in the Foster Care System

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The Cost of Caring: Secondary Traumatic Stress

David Conrad, LCSW, Coordinator, The Secondary Trauma Prevention Project:
sponsored by the Colorado Department of Human Services

Introduction

Foster Parents work daily, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with children who have been traumatized. They listen to their stories and feel their hurt. Empathy is often the most important tool foster parents bring to helping the children in their care. Unfortunately, the more empathic they are the greater their risk for internalizing the trauma of their foster children. The result of this engagement is *secondary traumatic stress*.

What is secondary traumatic stress? How is it the same and/or different from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)?

According to Dr. Charles Figley, author of Compassion Fatigue, Coping with Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder, secondary traumatic stress is "the natural consequent behaviors resulting from knowledge about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other. It is the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person". Until recently, when we spoke about persons being traumatized we were speaking only of those people who were directly exposed to the trauma. We referred to their condition as post-traumatic stress disorder. Examples of such persons were Vietnam War veterans and/or victims of domestic violence.

In the last 15 years, we have come to recognize that people, who work with, listen to and try and help children and adults who have been traumatized are at risk for internalizing their trauma. This condition is called secondary traumatic stress. The only difference between post-traumatic stress disorder and secondary trauma is that with secondary trauma you are "a step away" from the trauma. The symptoms of primary or secondary trauma can be exactly the same!

*"The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet."**

*(Rachel Remen, Kitchen Table Wisdom)

Why are foster parents at risk for developing secondary traumatic stress?

There are several reasons why foster parents are at risk for developing secondary trauma. Listed below are just a few of those reasons.

1) Empathy: Empathy is a valuable tool used by foster parents who work with traumatized children. Children get better in a foster home, not because their foster parents talk at them or tell them what to do, but because they are emotionally there for them. However, by empathizing with a child or "feeling their pain" the foster parent becomes vulnerable to internalizing the child's trauma-related pain.

2) Insufficient Recovery Time: Foster parents often listen to their foster children describe some pretty horrific events they have experienced. In addition, foster parents often listen to the same or similar horror stories over and over again. With children in their home 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, foster parents are often deprived of the "time off" they need to heal or to get some distance from what they have heard. These small stresses are cumulative and can, over time, have a negative effect on even the most compassionate and resilient foster parents.

3) Unresolved Personal Trauma: Many foster parents have had some personal loss or even traumatic experience in their own life (e.g., loss of a family member, death of a close friend, physical or emotional abuse). To some extent, the pain of their own experience(s) can be "re-activated" when they hear the child describe a traumatic situation similar to the one they experienced. Unless the foster parent has healed from their own trauma they are at increased risk for internalizing the trauma of their foster child.

4) Children are the Most Vulnerable Members of Our Society: Young children are completely dependent on adults for their emotional and physical needs. When adults maltreat children, it evokes a strong reaction in any person who cares about children. As the primary caretakers for vulnerable children,

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From the State Office

By Don Snyder,
Foster Care Administrator



This article is a brief outline of issues that many of you may face each time you care for foster children. It is reprinted with permission from the Summer 2003 journal called "Best Practice - Family Centered Child Welfare" that is published by the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family Centered Practice. The article has information to help you identify types of disorders and/or behavioral issues.

Resiliency, Risk Factors, and Attachment

Resilience: An individual's competence and successful adaptation, or "bounce back," following exposure to significant adversity and stressful events. **Vulnerability** is the susceptibility to negative developmental outcomes under high-risk conditions.

Risk and Protective Factors: Conditions that increase (risk factors) or decrease (protective factors) the likelihood that an individual or a family will later develop problems. Studies of resiliency in children have consistently found the most basic and important protective factor is a history of a caregiver-child attachment.

A child's emotional vulnerability can be affected by a variety of factors including genetic factors; prenatal development, including maternal drinking and drug abuse; prenatal nutrition and stress; Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effect; temperament; and birth parent history of mental illness, such as schizophrenia or manic depressive illness. If an infant's needs are not met consistently in a loving, nurturing way, attachment will not occur normally.

The attachment-disorder child does whatever she feels like, with no regard for others. She is unable to feel remorse for wrongdoing, mainly because she is unable to internalize right and wrong. This child may be savvy enough to speak knowledgeably about standards and values, but cannot truly understand or believe what she is saying. The child may tell you that something is wrong, but that will not stop her from doing it.

Foster or adoptive parents need support in preparing for and dealing with attachment issues. For many children, the trauma causing this disorder occurred long before their involvement with foster or adoptive parents. The parents also need to know and understand that the child's behavior is not caused from their parenting, but from past traumas. From this base, new parenting interventions can be designed from a cooperative relationship to fit a child with special needs. While not all children in foster care or those who are adopted develop this disorder, parents need to be aware of this possibility. The child also needs to understand what force is driving his or her feelings and controlling the child's behavior.

President's Corner

By James Schnabel



Greetings from the North Dakota Foster Parent Association!! I am James Schnabel and I am the new president. My wife Pamela and I farm and ranch in rural McIntosh County. Pamela is a teller for Hometown Credit Union and a piano teacher. We have two biological children, a girl age 8 and a boy age 5. We are very active in our church especially with children's ministries and have a passion for working with children. That is what led us into foster care. We saw a need in our community and pursued it. Like many of you we felt called to foster care.

The NDFPA stands at a crossroad at this time. We can continue on as usual or we can expand and better serve our members. The NDFPA is here for you and I would encourage ALL foster parents in the state of North Dakota to consider joining our association. We have a legislative committee that watches proposed laws that affect all of the foster parents and foster homes in our state. The NDFPA is a vehicle for communications among foster parents; it can become an information center for all foster parents. We annually provide training at our conference that is applicable to all foster parents and are planning to expand our training to better meet the needs of foster parents.

As president of the NDFPA, I would encourage all eight regions of the state to organize their own local associations to provide support and help to the foster parents in their region. We are willing to help you in this effort. It is my belief that there is strength in numbers and we all have something beneficial to supply to each other. I am very thankful for all you do as foster parents and am very aware of the many geographic obstacles that we must overcome.

It is my hope that the NDFPA can make a difference for the children of our state. It is my goal that no child in our state should go to bed hungry, scared, or abused. I realize this can't happen overnight or even in a year or two but we must keep fighting the battle one child at a time.

If you are encountering any problems in foster care feel free to contact us. We want to help in any way we can. We have an excellent board willing to serve you. Feel free to contact us at any time.

President - James Schnabel (701) 684-6211
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Secretary - Harlene Cole (701) 572-6068
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I look forward to meeting many foster parents in the next two years and will serve the foster parents of North Dakota to the best of my ability.

A New Approach called “Gearing Up For Positive Life Choices” at Charles Hall Youth Services

By Del Hager

From the early days of the Congregational Church mission founded by Reverend Charles L. Hall at Ft. Berthold in 1876, to the opening of the first group home in Bismarck in 1965, to the present day operation, there has been a goal established of providing a home for children where they would be safe, could get a good education and return to their community or reservation to be leaders. Today, Charles Hall Youth Services still embraces that goal and is making program improvements to further assist the youth in their care.

Kate Hanson, Director of Programs, recently spoke to Fostering Communications and explained the new program changes the youth will be experiencing. She stated, “We wanted to make (the program) a little more palatable for the kids, so we call the levels ‘gears’: First gear, second gear, third gear. We’re trying to tie in the concept of gears fitting together so that first gear fits in with second gear and third gear and together they all make the final movement.” The program is called “Gearing Up For Positive Life Choices.”

The orientation phase lasts approximately six weeks and gives everyone a chance to get to know each other. Kate explained that the youth will be working on “their story” in an essay format and will be helping the social workers come up with a treatment plan. They will identify why they are placed, who they are, their strengths and weakness, and write an autobiography. Kate explained, “We will teach them about basic social skills. Things like: following instructions, accepting ‘no’, showing respect, following rules, manners, and citizenship skills. We base a lot of our language on ‘being a good citizen.’ Things like: ‘as soon as you’re able to be a good citizen in this home, then you’re able to be a good citizen outside. So we’ll be watching real carefully to make sure you have the right skills so that you can do more and more outside of this house.” No home visits will be allowed for at least four weeks. An oral exam is given to be sure they understand all the rules of the Group Home. They also have to present their autobiography and treatment plan in a group setting before they can move to the first level or gear. Each youth will also keep a journal of activities on a daily basis. This will help them track their progress while at the Group Home.

During the planning process of developing the new program, Kate Hanson interviewed two boys from the Group Home who provided wonderful information to help build the system. They told her that the thing that motivated them the most was RECOGNITION. They said that recognition was more important than allowance, more important than CD’s, or other material rewards. They wanted to be recognized for their effort - to have somebody know that they really worked hard. As a result, one of the ways they will be recognized in this program will be by giving them a “gear” (yet to be designed) when they complete each level and a more significant charm or key chain upon completion of the entire program.

At the present time there are two homes for girls, Case Home and Hall Home, and one for boys, GoodBird Home.

Nine youth can live in each home. They maintain a 30-day Shelter Care program within these homes as well. Referrals are mostly from Burleigh County (about 70% of the total) and are for youth ages 12-18.

Hanson reported that nearly all youth are coming in with alcohol and/or drug issues. “There is a high percentage of kids whose parents are using alcohol and drugs and are neglecting the kids - a lot of neglect,” she said. There’s also a high number of youth whose parents are either deceased or in prison. She observed that this group of youth has the most behavioral difficulties. They seem to be “inconsolable.” She stated, “They blow up because they can’t handle something and you just can’t console them.” The kids with an absent parent through death or imprisonment are the ones at highest risk for more serious problems in the future.

Once a month they host a family night. The families are invited for a meal and to participate in an activity. There are plans for expanding this part of the program by incorporating challenging parts of the youth activities that involve “learning moments,” with their family members. One program the youth participate in that they hope to use with families is called High and Low Ropes. The Ropes program is designed and run by Denis Montplaisir as a way of “building teamwork, trust amongst one another, trust in yourself and working together,” Hanson noted.

The youth are also involved in an arts program. They go to United Tribes and are taught Indian art by a tribal teacher. Hanson described some of the activities, “They make their own dye, they paint on leather, they paint on gourds, and they wood-burn. It helps them build self-esteem and understand the real strengths they have.” She also said, “It is our belief that self-esteem is earned and not given.”

As the youth move through the levels there is a corresponding increase in rewards based upon their progress. There are normal routines of daily living that the youth need to master such as household tasks, schoolwork and following the rules. They earn points for being good citizens and completing their assigned tasks. They also earn “positive points” for exemplary citizenship such as helping another youth work through a problem and make a good choice. If they earn five positive points they can move through their level at a quicker pace. When they reach Level 3, they become “Junior Staff.” Hanson explained, “At that point, they can come home from school and have ‘normal’ kinds of activities such as going out with friends to the mall, having their own TV in their room, take a nap, go in the fridge on their own, pick their own duties, correct other kids, lead groups, extra sleep time on the weekends, and all kinds of things.”

CHYS has a new Executive Director as of August 25th, when Gayla Sherman, MSW, joined the staff. The other social workers in the agency are: LaVanna Fuchs in GoodBird Home; Rachael Suda, in Hall Home; and, Greta Snyder in

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Scholarship

From Vicki Hoff



The NDFPA choose Vanna Kay to receive the \$600 Scholarship from the Association. Vanna is the foster daughter of Lauren and Theresa Osteroos. She received high school awards for “student of the month”, most improved performer, best actress, and superior acting awards while being involved in one-act plays, drama, and speech. Vanna is very active at her Church and Camp Metigoshe. She is currently attending Association Free Lutheran Bible School in Minnesota and plans to earn a degree in General Bible studies in the next 2 years. Her future plans involve a return to North Dakota where she will pursue a degree in Youth and Addiction Counseling. Vanna said that formal education is important because in the end you will earn more money, learn essential life skills, and be able to look back and be glad that you made a smart decision.

The Ruth Meiers Scholarship was awarded to Jason Hahn. He will receive the \$500 Scholarship to help him attend college at MSU-Bottineau. Jason is the foster son of Jim and Sherrell Almond. As a high school student he played basketball his sophomore year and was the student manager for football and baseball. Jason also received high academic honors in high school. Jason is very proud to have graduated because he accomplished something few of his family members ever did. In college, Jason wants to study Criminal Law or Web Design. He says formal education beyond high school is important for a person because the employment opportunities are less if a person has just a high school diploma and no other type of education.

Awards

From Pam Terfehr



Social Worker of the Year

Darlene Hill, Burleigh County Social Services, Bismarck

Darlene Hill received her Master of Social Work from the University of North Dakota. Darlene is a dedicated professional to children and families. She is very knowledgeable in the areas of child welfare, the Indian Child Welfare Act and family systems theory. Darlene approaches children and families in a strengths based manner including respect, caring and honesty to ensure that the family’s needs are met. Darlene understands the importance of foster families who provide a loving home to children who have been abused, neglected or experience behavioral problems. Darlene is supportive to her employees and always has an “open door policy” to provide guidance and a listening ear. We truly appreciate what she does for families and children.

Agency of the Year

Burleigh County Social Services

The Children and Family Services Unit is a complimentary unit to the Child Protective Services Unit. There are a total of 23 Social Workers, 4 Parent Aides, and 1

Case Aide in the two units combined. A Social Work Supervisor heads each unit and the agency Director is Shari Doe.

Children come to the attention of the CPS unit because of emergencies that occur both during and after regular working hours. Some of the emergencies result in the placement of children into foster care. These families are always referred for case management services from the Child Protection Unit. At this time, the majority of the social workers who do case management use the Wraparound philosophy of case management. Once we are back up to full staff it is our hope to move into Wraparound with all families. The uniqueness of Wraparound case management allows us to build a plan based on the strengths of the family. In addition, the social workers are able to maintain lower case loads and utilize close clinical supervision. Our belief is that Wraparound case management allows for more children to remain in their own homes, or if they are removed, to return more quickly to their family homes.

In addition, Burleigh County Social Services licenses and re-licenses the foster homes, handle Crossroads, Children’s Special Health Services, and Targeted Case Management for foster children. Another program within this unit is the Parent Aide Program, which utilizes para-professionals that go directly into the homes and work with the parents and at times, the children.

Special Appreciation Award

Children and Family Services Training Center — University of North Dakota

All year, UND Children and Family Services Training Center (CFSTC) offers their time and effort to coordinate training sessions for all ND Foster Parents, as well as keeping track of our education hours and answering thousands of questions, both from agency staff and foster parents. CFSTC staff attend many of these training sessions, and either teach the sessions, or assist the trainers. They also help the foster parents understand and fill out all of the paperwork for reimbursement. They work closely with the agencies, as well as the NDFPA, to ensure that high quality training is provided to help foster parents do the job of caring for North Dakota’s children.

The Training Center does a great job for us. A huge THANKS to Pete Tunseth, (Director), Del Hager and Jason Moug, (Training Coordinators) and Kathy Newman and Jody Clauson (Support Staff).

NDFPA

NORTH DAKOTA FOSTER PARENTS ASSOCIATION is looking for feedback from all County and PATH foster parents, as well as social workers who attended this year’s 2004 Foster Parent Conference in Bismarck.

The newly elected Board of Directors is sending out SURVEYS...to evaluate the conference and to find out how the association can better serve its regions in the state.

Please take time to fill out your survey and return it as soon as possible.

The Cost of Caring: Secondary Traumatic Stress

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foster parents are at increased risk for having a strong emotional reaction to what they hear and learn about.

How do you know if you are suffering from secondary traumatic stress?

One of the most difficult tasks for a foster parent is to recognize if they are suffering from secondary traumatic stress. Every person reacts differently and copes differently with their reaction to adversity. What one person finds helpful may not be helpful for another person and vice versa. All people must remember to call on the coping mechanisms that work best for them. There are, however, several "individual indicators of distress" which can tell us that we are at increased risk for developing secondary trauma. A key indicator is when you find yourself acting and feeling in ways that don't feel normal to you. It is normal for all of us to have a range of emotions that include anger, sadness, rage, depression or anxiety. However, when these emotions become more extreme or prolonged than usual, it is a potential indicator of distress (see table below).

When you find yourself feeling emotional or physical indicators of extreme distress, it is time to step back and evaluate yourself. Are there specific images or cases that keep coming into your head again and again? Are there situations with children that provoke anxiety and that you try to avoid? Are there situations or people that remind you of a particularly distressing case? If you are experiencing some of these indicators, on a consistent basis, you should reach out and ask for help from another foster parent or from your caseworker. If the trauma symptoms become severe and last for more than a few days, you should consider seeing a therapist who specializes in trauma work.

Emotional Indicators	Physical Indicators	Personal Indicators
Anger	Headaches	Self-isolation
Sadness	Stomach aches	Cynicism
Prolonged Grief	Back aches	Mood swings
Anxiety	Exhaustion	Irritability

Self-Care Strategies for Combating Secondary Trauma Stress

Understanding your own needs and responding appropriately is of paramount importance in combating secondary traumatic stress. For foster parents it is critically important to find ways to "get a break" from parenting. To avoid feeling overwhelmed by feelings of frustration and sadness it is important to engage in activities you consider fun and playful. Any person working with maltreated or traumatized children needs to set aside time to rest, emotionally and physically, both their minds and their hearts. Also, they need to connect with their communities in ways other than through their work. For example, they need to help their neighbors, join a garden club or just sit on their back porch and enjoy the sights and sounds of a warm, sunny day.

Remember, in the end, our ability to help children who have suffered depends upon our ability to care for

ourselves....physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually, so we can be there for them when they need us.

Let me close by saying, in approaching your work please listen to the wisdom of the following passage by Marc Parent is his book, Turning Stones: My Days and Nights with Children at Risk.

*"Rescuing one child from the harm of one night is glorious success. The evening is an opportunity to touch a life at a critical moment and make it better-not for a lifetime, not even for tomorrow, but for one moment. One moment-not to talk, but to act-not to change the world, but to make it better. It's all that can be done and not only is that enough-that's brilliant."**

Recommended Reading

Figley, C.R. (Ed.) (1995). *Compassion fatigue: Coping with secondary traumatic stress in those who treat the traumatized*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Stamm, B.H. (1995). *Secondary traumatic stress: Self-care issues for clinicians, researchers, and educators*. Maryland: Sidran Press.

Herman, J. (1997). *Trauma and Recovery*. New York: BasicBooks.

Parent, M. (1996). *Turning Stones: My Days and Nights with Children at Risk*. New York: Ballantine

About the Author

David Conrad is a native of Bismarck, North Dakota. From 1991-1994, he was a supervisor in the ongoing child protection unit in Burleigh County and worked closely with their foster parents. He treasures the memories of those experiences and of working with some truly extraordinary foster parents. He currently is a Senior Instructor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Denver. He can be contacted at Conrad.David@tchden.org or by calling him at 303-861-6183.

2004 Conference News

By Kenn and Harlene Cole

How can I express the experience of going somewhere and meeting with over a hundred people that share a common bond or commitment? It could be called "AWESOME", "GREAT", "FANTASTIC", and they all would be appropriate. I have just described the 2004 North Dakota Foster Parent Conference, held in Mandan at the Seven Seas Motel, October 1-3, 2004.

Special thank you to Region 7 Foster Parents for hosting the conference this year. Great hospitality and a lot of planning went into this conference and we appreciate it so very much. Also, thanks to Pam Terfehr who did a great job of keeping things running smoothly after unexpected last minute changes and resignations of Board Members.

Again we are so fortunate to have Del Hager - UND Children and Family Services Training Center teaming up with NDFPA to bring a great presentation for the training sessions. We were introduced to Allen and Mary Goodearle, from Plantation, Florida, who spoke to us throughout the

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New Approach

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Case Home. Linda Bahrens and Jeff Bashus run the Independent Living Program.

Referral information to Charles Hall can be obtained by calling 701-255-2773, or by writing to 513 East Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND, 58504. Please visit the Charles Hall website for more information at: www.charleshallyouthservices.com.

Conference News

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day. The information we gained was incredible. We Need This Information!! Since the beginning of foster care, foster parents have parented from the heart. They have shared their home and their love, with children in need. TODAY FOSTER PARENTS NEED MORE!!

We need the ability to work as part of a professional treatment team.

We must be effective at getting our point heard by the other members of the team.

We know our child better than anyone else. We need to be an effective advocate.

("Direct quote from New Paradigms Unlimited)

We also had the Fire Safety Training that is always so good. The "hands on" training is such an effective way of

experiencing the fire extinguishers actually in use. Thanks to the Mandan Firemen.

If you were not at this year's conference, please mark October 7-9, 2005, when we will once again have our annual Training Conference in Bismarck.

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